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AUTHOR Leary, Mark R.: And Others
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ABSTRACT

Since its appearance in 1974, the Snyder Self-Monitoring Scale has been employed in research dealing with self-presentation, attribution, and attitude expression. The Scale was developed to measure the degree to which people are concerned with the social appropriateness of their behavior, are aware of relevant social cues, and regulate their expressive behavior. Examination of the scale items, however, suggests that not all three aspects of self-monitoring are tapped equally, and that some items do not clearly represent any aspect of self-monitoring. The Self-Monitoring Scale was administered to 237 undergraduates and factor analyzed to determine whether it measures a unitary construct. A principal axis analysis with varimax rotation yielded three major factors: Public Impression Management, Acting, and Social Insecurity. Of the three, only the first factor was clearly central to the construct of self-monitoring. Results suggest that the multidimensionality of the scale makes its use in classifying subjects as high versus low self-monitors questionable and may result in equivocal research findings. (Author/HLM)

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The Multidimensionality of Self-Monitoring

Mark R. Leary, Starr E. Silver, Bruce W. Darby, and Barry R. Schlenker

University of Florida

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Mark R. Leary, Starr E. Silver, Bruce W. Darby, and Barry R. Schlenker

University of Florida

Since its appearance in 1974, the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974) has been increasingly employed in a variety of research, particularly in that dealing with self-presentation, attribution, and attitude expression (Snyder, Note 1). Although some studies have found the scale useful in identifying individual differences in certain social responses (e.g., Lippa, 1976, Snyder & Monson, 1976), others have obtained results that are not entirely consistent with the original conceptualization of self-monitoring (e.g., Arkin, Gabrenya, Appelman, & Cochran, 1979; Schlenker, Miller, & Leary, Note 2; Von Baeyer, Sherk, & Zanna, Note 3). This state of affairs, coupled with reasons for believing that the scale items do not tap a unitary construct, prompted an internal analysis of the scale.

Snyder (1974, p. 527) defines self-monitoring as the ability to "observe and control" one's self-presentational and expressive behavior. A "corollary ability" to self-monitoring is assumed to be "an acute sensitivity to the cues in a situation which indicate what expression or self-presentation is appropriate and what is not." Snyder's (1974) 25-item, true-false format, Self-Monitoring Scale was developed to measure the degree to which people (a) are concerned with the social appropriateness of their behavior, (b) are aware of relevant social cues, and (c) regulate their expressive behavior. Examination of the scale items, however, suggests that: (a) not all three aspects of self-monitoring as conceptualized by Snyder are tapped equally, and (b) some items do not clearly represent any aspect of self-monitoring. Further, the reliabilities (.70 and .63) and item-total correlations (ranging from .13 to .46) reported by Snyder (1974)

suggest that the scale is only moderately homogeneous. Although the term self-monitoring suggests that the scale should be measuring a unitary concept, the scale may not be doing so, perhaps resulting in "noise" in subject classification and equivocal results from some studies using the scale.

A factor analysis of the scale was undertaken to determine the degree to which it is measuring a unitary construct and, should the scale be multidimensional, to determine the nature of the factors involved. This analysis was conducted without knowledge of a similar investigation by Briggs, Cheek, and Buss (in press), whose findings will be discussed in conjunction with the present results.

Method

Snyder's (1974) Self-Monitoring scale was administered to 237 undergraduates during the initial phases of two unrelated experiments. Subjects' scale responses were scored according to instructions provided by Snyder (1974, p. 531) and submitted to a principal axis factor analysis. Because Pearson correlation coefficients assume a continuous distribution of item scores and the scale responses are dichotomous (i.e., true-false), the matrix of tetrachoric correlations among scale items, with communality estimates on the diagonal, was utilized as the input matrix. Tetrachoric correlations assume that each scale item constitutes a "forced dichotomy," that is, that the attribute underlying each item is continuously distributed, but artificially dichotomized by forcing subjects to respond either "true" or "false" to each item.[1] In addition, Kuder-Richardson 20 was calculated to examine scale homogeneity.

Results and Discussion

Kuder-Richardson 20 calculated on the 25 scale items revealed a reliability coefficient of .74, which is very close to the reliabilities obtained on inde-

pendent samples by Snyder (1974; .70 and .63) and Briggs et al. (in press; .69 and .67).

Upon examination of the principal axis factor matrix and the corresponding eigenvalues, it was decided to retain and rotate nine factors. The first nine factors accounted for 85.0% of the common score and 63.3% of the total variance, and had latent roots ranging from .73 to 5.60.[2]

An oblique, simple-loadings rotation (Jennrich & Sampson, 1966) was first performed to determine whether the obtained factors were highly correlated, thus precluding an orthogonal rotation. Inspection of the intercorrelations among the nine primary factors revealed relatively small correlations ranging from .001 to .342 with only 4 (of 36) correlations greater than .20. Thus, it was concluded that an orthogonal solution would not seriously distort the factor structure.

The tetrachoric correlation matrix was then submitted to an orthogonal Varimax rotation. Although nine factors were carried into rotation to prevent compression of the factor space, only the three largest factors were clearly interpretable. The remainder were comprised of doublets and triplets and accounted for relatively little of the variance.

The factor structure for the first three factors is presented in Table 1. Only items with factor loadings greater than .40 are presented.[3]

Insert Table 1 About Here

The first factor, Public Impression Management, has as its central component the manipulation of one's public appearance as a function of different situations and audiences. Items loading heavily on this factor reflect the

situational-specificity of behavior, pleasing and impressing others, hiding one's true feelings, and conforming to others' expectations. With the exception of Item 21, all of these items also load on the "Other-Directedness" factor obtained by Briggs et al. (in press). Although the items comprising the factor do reflect an orientation toward others, such a label is too general and does not encompass the specific self-presentational nature of the items. Of the three major factors obtained, Public Impression Management seems to be most closely related to the original conceptualization of self-monitoring.

Factor II, which we and Briggs et al. both label Acting, generally reflects one's reported ability to control one's expressive behavior--much as a good actor does. While this ability is related to self-monitoring, the particular items that load on this factor seem to represent instances in which "acting" is appropriate or even expected, as opposed to "acting" on the everyday stage of life in the dramaturgical sense (e.g., Goffman, 1959). For example, the highest loading items deal with being a good actor, being good at charades and improvisation, being an entertainer, and making impromptu speeches. The mere possession of such abilities may or may not be directly related to observing and controlling one's behavior in everyday encounters. Thus, although conceptually related to self-monitoring, it is not clear that these acting-ability items are a critical part of the construct itself; at the very least, it can be said that they constitute a factor that is distinct from Public Impression Management.

The third factor appears to reflect scale items dealing with unease in social encounters and has been called Social Insecurity. The structure of this factor is, again, quite similar to a factor obtained by Briggs et al., although they focused on the opposite pole of the factor and labeled it Extraversion. However, inspection of the items loading greater than .40 on Factor III reveals

that they represent, not only a lack of social involvement (rarely being the center of attention, letting others tell jokes and stories) but experienced social difficulties (not being well-liked, having trouble changing one's behavior, feeling awkward). While introversion may result from such anxieties and extraversion from their absence, those concepts do not adequately represent the social insecurity that seems to be reflected in Factor III.

Conclusions

Results from the present analysis, as well as those from the independent investigation by Briggs et al. (in press), suggest that: (a) the Self-Monitoring Scale does not measure a unitary construct, and (b) only one (Factor I) of the three constructs that are tapped by the scale can be unambiguously interpreted as assessing people's self-reported concern for social appropriateness, awareness of social cues, and regulation of their everyday expressive behavior. Factor II seems to assess acting ability under conditions where acting is an expected role, and Factor III appears to assess people's social insecurities.

Despite procedural differences between the present study and that of Briggs et al., the factor structure of three major factors is quite similar, although, as in most factor analytic studies, the precise interpretation of the factors is open to debate.[4] The most important point, of course, is that the scale itself does not measure a unitary attribute, thus creating a situation where people may receive the same score for different reasons. Such potential misclassification may be at least partly responsible for the equivocal results obtained in prior studies that employed the scale. The construct itself seems sound and useful for a fuller understanding of social behavior, but more judicious use of the Self-Monitoring Scale can be advised.

Footnotes

[1]It is recognized that the use of even tetrachoric correlations on dichotomous data may be hazardous, particularly when the proportion of subjects responding true versus false to each scale item deviates markedly from a 50/50 split. However, examination of subjects' endorsement splits showed that only three items split as widely as 25/75. Thus, tetrachoric correlations were employed, while recognizing the possibility of distorted factor structure. As it turned out, the clarity of the obtained factors suggests that the tetrachoric correlations were not highly biased.

[2]One of the most common misconceptions regarding factor analysis is the belief that factors should be retained for rotation only if their eigenvalues are greater than 1. While this criterion is acceptable for principal components analysis (in which total score variance is factored), it usually results in underrotation when principal axis analysis is employed (in which only common score variance is factored). Actually, a better criterion in PA analysis is to retain factors until over 90% of the common score variance is accounted for (e.g., Guertin & Bailey, 1970). Failure to do so may result in factor compression -- a condition in which the common factor space is not allowed to expand to its inherent dimensionality so that uncorrelated scale items are forced to develop high loadings on the same factor. (Although it is difficult to determine from their article, it seems likely that Briggs et al. underrotated their factor structure, which resulted in a few items clinging to factors to which they don't seem to belong.) Thus, a sufficient number of factors must be carried into rotation to permit a clear representation of factor structure, although unrecognizable and inconsequential later factors need not be considered (see Guertin & Bailey, 1970, Chapter 7).

[3]For the interested reader, the remaining factors and the items loading greater than .35 on them were: IV (3, 7, 9), VI (15, 18, 25), VII (3, 10), VIII (2, 23), and IX (4, 5).

[4]The procedural differences between the present study and that of Briggs et al. should be noted. First, Briggs et al. converted Snyder's original true-false response format to a 5-point Likert scale to generate data appropriate for Pearson correlations, whereas the present study employed tetrachoric coefficients appropriate for forced-dichotomous data. Second, Briggs et al.'s factor analysis was performed via the Jorëskog subroutine in SPSS using the maximum likelihood solution and oblique rotation with Kaiser normalization. The present study, upon discovering very small correlations among oblique primary factors, performed a principal axes analysis with Varimax rotation. Third, Briggs et al. retained and rotated only three factors (which may have been too few; see Footnote 1), whereas the present study rotated nine, although only three were identifiable and psychologically meaningful. In light of these analytic differences, the similarity in the obtained factor structures is striking.

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Table 1

First Three Factors of Nine-Factor

Varimax-Rotated Solution

Factor I: Public Impression Management

.88	In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons (13).
.79	In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else (19).
.63	I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people (6).
.58	I'm not always the person I appear to be (16).
-.46	I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor (17)**.
.42	I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them (25).
-.41	I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations (21)**.

Factor II: Acting

.87	I would probably make a good actor (8).
-.79	I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting (20)**.
.47	I have considered being an entertainer (18).
.44	I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information (5).
-.41	I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people (1)**.

Factor III: Social Insecurity

.86	I am not particularly good at making other people like me (14)**.
.57	At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going (22)**.
.48	I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor (17)**.
.48	I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations (21)**.
.44	I feel a bit awkward in company and do not show up quite as well as I should (23)**.

Note. Only factor loadings greater than .40 are presented. Numbers in parentheses refer to scale item numbers. Asterisked (**) items were reverse-scored. Factor III was reflected.